

Mothering Sunday - 10th March - Inclusive Church - Men and Women

Genesis 1: 26 - 31

Luke 8:40 - 48

I want to talk about Men and Women today - as part of inclusive church we're looking at how well we welcome people into church. We've thought about how we cope with disabilities, mental and physical, ethnic groups, rich and poor, young people, and we will go on to think about sexuality - but today - Mothering Sunday, I thought would be a good opportunity to think about women (and men).

When did you first notice you were a boy or a girl, or something else? (We're not going to talk about the something else today, but we will).

I can't really remember at all - was it primary school? Was it swimming club? Perhaps you can remember, perhaps you can't.

When did you notice that you were treated differently because you were a boy or a girl?

Boys don't do that, girls don't play like that.

Again, most of us won't notice this stuff, it's just there. Like the goldfish, we don't notice the water we're swimming in, it's all around us, it's just what's there.

But some people do notice - because they feel it - but I want to climb trees even though I'm a girl, I want to do ballet even though I'm a boy. And pretty much all of us do realise at some stage - oh - I'm not really encouraged to do that, because I'm a girl.

I meet lots of people who did well at school, but were told they might join the typist pool if they really wanted to work. Others who worked in banks, or schools, who as soon as they got married - not even had children - were required to leave work. Sacked. Fired.

And you all know this. I'm the one who's been educated here.

It might sound shocking - was this Victorian? No this was the 1960's. The Sex Discrimination Act didn't come in till 1975.

But changing the law, doesn't change people's attitudes - doesn't change the water in the goldfish bowl. People are passed over for jobs, treated differently, and the way culture and society mould us, continues. In the 1980's my sister was the only woman studying engineering out of a year group of 180. Is engineering male? Can women not do it? That huge pressure of culture - this is what women do, this is what men do - and I don't know who benefits, it doesn't seem to be men, it's not women. *But it's not nice.*

Here's some statistics about how common it is today - 2024

Women are half of the world's population - but they make up 70% of those living in poverty

They do 75% of the world's agricultural work, but own 1% of the land.

Here's some fun ones -

78% of news articles, are written by men

84% of guests and reporters on Radio 4's today show - are men

Men and women are still not paid the same for the same job

There is still massive inequality and injustice.

Look - this is not what God wanted, or planned, or wants for us now. If the kingdom of God is where God reigns, where things run on God's lines - then the church should be working to make the kingdom of God come here and now. What do we pray - your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is heaven.

So what does the bible say -

Genesis - male and female he created them.

The same.

Its only after the fall, after our lack of trust, that we get these role division - men dig, women give birth.

(People sometimes get picky and say - but eve was made of man's rib, so she's inferior - but then Adam is made of dust, so is he inferior to dust? And rib is the word for side.

Or Eve was made to be helper. That's the same Hebrew word that is used for God - to be our helper - and no one's suggestion God's inferior)

So did men feel jealous that the women got to do the important job of childbearing, or did they get frustrated? Or did they say - poor women, lets look after you while you're pregnant, and feeding - and then forget to hand back power a little later?

Beuase there is quite a strong patriarchy in the Genesis, Exodus, and Isreal - in fact this is interesting about our hidden bias.

The white privileged male reads about Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Solomon, David - and thinks, well men are in charge.

They miss, don't hear, don't notice - Sarah giving brith to a nation, Miriam - Moses sister being a leader, or Deborah the judge of all Israel, or Esther who saved Israel, or the slave girl who caused Naaman to be healed - its literally everywhere - but its not talked about!

Jesus - a radical man - in a world where women were not allowed in the synagogue, or the inner court of the temple, has women disciples - named, Mary, Joanna, Salome. He talks to women in public, he eats with them, he stays with them. That doesn't seem weird to you - but it was way out there for 1st century Palestine.

The early church - met in Nympha's house - Colossians 4:15, the church that met at Lydia's house - Acts, or Priscilla and Aquila.

Paul says - Gal 3:28 - 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

So if that's the kingdom of God - we've a way to go yet. And the church seems as stuck in the patriarchy as the rest of the world.

So lets do our bit today - men and women play different parts, but only women are mothers. And we've all been there, we've all been mothered.

The miracle of growing inside another, of being fed and nurtured.

Alright some have had better mothers, some have had poor mothers, but we would not be alive without them.

The selfless giving, the holding, the sleepless nights

The toll and cost emotionally, mentally, let alone what it does to your bodies.

Yet you willingly take it on.

This world would not be here without you.

Every day, women give birth to a new world, to our future.

Thank you, or a posy of flowers, is not enough, but its a start

And may it remind **us** of the debt we owe,

And may it remind **you** of our love for you.

This mothers day, we celebrate the amazing gift of mothers, and we thank you for all you are to us.

